SIMPLE DIRECTION IN THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER

THE LIBRARY
THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE
CATHEDRAL HEIGHTS
NEW YORK 25, N. Y.
C.S.M.V.

SIMPLE DIRECTION IN THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER

By
A Member of
C.S.M.V.

S. MARY'S PRESS, WANTAGE
1956

WANTAGE,
Epiphany, 1936.

THIS little book makes no claim to originality. It was drawn up at the suggestion of Father Northcott, C.R., in 1933, for the African Community of the Daughters of Mary, and owes much to his help and encouragement. It also embodies, with their permission, teaching given by Bishop Neville Talbot, and some material from Father Bede Frost's *Art of Mental Prayer*, and the Reverend F.P. Harton's *Elements of the Spiritual Life*.

THE AUTHOR.

First published by W. Heffer & Sons, Ltd. 1936.
2nd edition. 1937.
3rd edition, by Pax House. 1948.
4th edition, by kind permission of the Church Literature Association. 1954.
5th edition. 1956.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

SISTER JULIET C.S.M.V., who compiled this little book, entered into her rest on the 30th day of January, 1956. Will those who are helped by her teaching say a prayer for the repose of her soul? *R.I.P.*

FOREWORD

(1933)

THIS little book is to be commended to those who wish to pray better. It was originally written for a small community of native women in the Northern Transvaal, but it was felt by some of us that it ought to have a wider circulation.

Many of the books on prayer and the spiritual life are too elaborate, too complicated and often too expensive, moreover they seem to me to take too little account of the difficulties of ordinary people,—one of the greatest in these days is to get any privacy.

Here is a book with the root of the matter in it, yet in simple and unalarming form,—not too elaborate for ordinary busy people, yet with enough meat in it to satisfy a saint.

May God's blessing rest upon it!

(*Signed*) ARTHUR JOHANNESBURG.

SIMPLE DIRECTION

IN

THE ESSENTIALS OF PRAYER

I. The Nature of Prayer

Prayer is being at home with God. It is the home atmosphere, the home life of the children of God.

Children at home with their parents may talk, listen, be silent, look at their parents, laugh when happy, cry when sad or sorry.

So in our prayer life, we, God's children, may talk to Him; listen to Him; be silent in His Presence, just looking at Him and thinking about Him; we may be full of joy and thanksgiving, or, feeling penitent and sorrowful, we may tell Him our troubles and grief.

Just as the foundation of a happy home life is love so all our prayer life is rooted in love.

The people who really pray live in simplicity, freedom and love in the family of God their Father, and are the true people of power.

II. The End and the Beginning of Prayer

The end of all prayer is God, not self; His glory, not our own enrichment, progress or enjoyment.

Whatever feelings God may give us in prayer, they are not the measure nor purpose of our prayer life.

All true prayer has this object—to know God.

We get in touch with God through Jesus Christ, Who is both God and Man. 'He is the Door or Way into the supreme but unimaginable Reality. Enter in, rest in the light which shines in Him.'

The true test of the value of our prayer is deeper humility, increase of love and desire for God, and closer likeness between our outward life and our prayer life.

'God is Who He is; this is the quest of all true prayer. And the true effect of prayer is to know Who He is.'

'All prayer should begin with God, continue with God and end with God.'

As all prayer *ends* in God, so all prayer *begins* with God.

'He Who *is* before we begin.'

'God is ever coming forth towards us; is seeking and pursuing us; has found us before ever we have begun to find Him.'

The Cross is the proof of this. 'There it stands, so definite, so concrete, and its meaning is *what God is towards us*, His love for us. The Cross is the revelation of heaven come down to earth, of God seeking and finding man. It is the translation into sheer actuality of that wonderful word—"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him".'

So when prayer is full of difficulty, when we feel cold and dry and poor, we can own and express our poverty and yet be full of trust and hope.

'For the Cross stands; the assurance of what *God* is, no matter what *we* are.'

III. Kinds of Prayer

There are two chief kinds of prayer, vocal and mental.

Vocal Prayer depends on the use of words as in public services, prayers we say, and the great forms of prayer such as the Our Father, Creed, Hail Mary.

Mental Prayer is prayer of the mind and does not depend upon words.

These two kinds of prayer cannot be kept quite separate, as of course we must use our minds when we are saying prayers.

IV. Mental Prayer

Mental prayer has different stages. We can divide them into three when we speak or read about them, but when we pray they cannot be kept separate, though there will always be more of one kind than of another.

These three stages are called Meditation, Affective Prayer and Contemplation.

Meditation is loving and thinking, and is chiefly prayer of the mind.

Affective Prayer is loving and longing, using the affections, and is chiefly prayer of the heart.

Contemplation is loving and looking, often quite silently, and is chiefly prayer of the will.

Each of these three stages must now be described more fully.

A. Meditation

The prayer of Meditation is composed of considerations, affections, petitions and resolutions.

It has three chief parts:—

1. Preparation, i.e. choice of subject, placing self in the presence of God.
2. The Meditation itself, i.e. thinking about it. praying about it, making various acts and colloquies, i.e. talking with God and loving Him.
3. Conclusion, i.e. Resolution, Thanksgiving.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (S. Luke xv. 11) gives a good example of this kind of prayer.

The Prodigal uses his imagination to picture the scene, and thinks about his father and his house. This leads to a colloquy (though with himself, not God), and finally to an excellent resolution.

B. Affective Prayer

This consists of acts of loving desire, which include:—

1. *Deliberate acts of the will.*

   e.g. 'O God, my heart is ready, my heart is ready.'
   'Firmly I believe and truly God is Three and God is One.'
   'I love supremely, solely, Him the Holy, Him the Strong.'

2. *Pouring out of the affections* towards God in acts of love, joy, hope, desire etc.

   e.g. 'Lord, in ceaseless contemplation Fix my thankful soul on Thee.'
   'O Jesu, Thou the beauty art Of angel worlds above.'
   'Light above light, and bliss beyond bliss,
   Whom words cannot utter, lo, Who is this?'
   'Most Sacred Heart, I love Thy love, I love to be loved by Thee.'

3. *Aspirations*, i.e. acts suggested to the soul by the Holy Spirit: inward stirrings of the Spirit; concerned with God Himself; desire for God because He is God.

   e.g. 'O God, Thou art my God.'
   'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.'
   'My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God.'
   'O wondrous Fount of Love,
   O Well of waters free!'

'Affective prayer is the prayer of Christ's lovers. They know the truth and the truth makes them free; free from deliberate delight in sin, free to love God, and their prayer is the action of that love.

'The prayer is expressed in repeated acts of the will. Words are few, often the same phrase is repeated over and over again.

'Prayer becomes more and more a loving converse between the soul and its God, a converse of speech and silence, of stammering words often repeated.'

Some people find it helpful to have a plan for these acts of prayer such as the following:—

First, the acts of approach to God.

(*a*) Adoration, e.g.

'Praise the Lord, O my soul: . . . . Holy Name.'

'Bending low before Thee, Helpless I adore Thee.'

'I give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.'

(*b*) Humility, e.g.

'I am not worthy, cold and bare The lodging of my soul.'

'Weak is the effort of my heart, and cold my warmest thought.'

(*c*) Penitence, e.g.

'Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling.'

'Just as I am, O Lamb of God I come.'

Then the chief acts of the prayer.

(*a*) Faith, e.g.

'This God is our God for ever and ever.'

'God, even our own God.'

'Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ.'

(*b*) Hope, e.g.

'And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in Thee.'

'I hope and trust most fully, In that manhood crucified.'

'O Lord, in Thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded.'

(c) Love, e.g.

'Jesu, my Lord, I Thee adore, O make me love Thee more and more.'

'Pour Thy love into my heart every moment of the day and night.'

'Thou, O Lord God, art the thing that I long for.'

C. Contemplation

Such prayer cannot really be described, but it includes:—

1. 'The prayer in which the soul looks up in silent faith to God, and waits for Him. This needs some effort on its part, though little.'
2. 'The prayer in which God does all; sweeps down upon the soul and holds it, as it were, in His grip. The soul can do nothing but remain passive in that grip.'

These two main types of contemplation are called 'acquired' and 'infused' respectively.

'The whole development of prayer lies in God growing more and more dominant, and the soul more and more simple and still, till this last stage is reached.'

'A knowledge of the essential meaning of contemplation — that strong action of God — does help one to understand some of the previous stages of prayer. One sees them in the light of their goal.'

'Growth in prayer is growth in simplicity.'

Just as a person learning something new and difficult, such as driving a motor car, has at first to give much attention to rules and details, and then as he gets more accustomed to what he is doing, can free his mind for other things until at last he is, as we say, quite at home in his occupation, so by degrees, in His own way and at His own time, the Holy Spirit leads souls from meditation and much use of the mind, to prayer which is simpler and more full of love and silence.

V. Two Great Methods of Prayer

Here are two great ways of prayer suited for any of the three stages of Mental Prayer, i.e. Meditation, Affective Prayer, and Contemplation.

1. This consists of three very simple and sustained acts, of which our Lord Himself is the sole object.

(a) *Jesus before the eyes, Adoration.*

The soul having placed itself in the presence of Jesus contemplates Him in one of His virtues, such as humility, love, obedience, looking at some incident in the Gospels which illustrates it, or at some of His teaching upon it, but in quite a general sort of way. It looks and adores.

'Lord enlighten me; shew me Thyself.'

(b) *Jesus in the heart, Communion.*

The soul now draws into itself the virtue it has seen in our Lord. It sees and desires with all the intensity of which it is capable, to be like Jesus in this thing.

'Like as the hart desireth . . . O God.'

(c) *Jesus in the hands, Co-operation.*

Here the soul lays itself whole in the Will of God.

'My God, I give myself to Thee,
Thine ever, only Thine to be.'

This act is most important and most full of love. It will usually lead to some simple and definite resolution.

This simple plan can be varied to meet the needs of different souls, and of the same soul at different times.

It is a ladder by which souls may climb freely to the prayer of contemplatlon, if it be God's Will to call them thither.

2. This consists in the use of the *Our Father*, the prayer given us by our Lord Himself.

Each sentence may be used as a subject for consideration and meditation; or as an act of heart and will; or as an aspiration of the soul longing for God Himself and union with Him.

Thus:—'Very slowly say the Lord's Prayer thinking quietly and simply of each word, drawing out the meaning of it, tasting its sweetness, dwelling on it or on a phrase such as "Thy Kingdom", "Thy Kingdom come", "Thy Will", "Thy Will be done", for as long as you can with profit, then passing on.'

'Let your whole self pray, be lifted up to the thought of God, Father, our Father, my Father, O Father infinite, eternal, loving, bountiful, I love Thee, I adore Thee, look on me Thy child. *Thy* child, God's child. What love of Thine for me . . .' and so on.

VI. Mortification and Prayer

Prayer is impossible without mortification, dying to self in order to rise to God,

'To come into union with God we must go by the Way, that is, by Jesus Christ; we must "put on Christ", and there is no other Christ than He Whose whole life was a putting away, not of sin but of self; a willing, joyful, entire submission of His whole Being, mind and will, to the Will of God.

'It is to put on the Christ Who "pleased not Himself", "sought not His own will"; chose poverty, humility, obedience, suffering for Himself, and demanded them from all who would follow Him.'

'Work in me, I beseech Thee,
Lord Jesus,
a strong determination and firm resolution
to persevere in prayer and mortification:
grant that the longer Thou delayest
to make me wholly Thine,
the more my faith in Thee may grow.'

VII. Books of Prayer

'It is useful to keep a notebook into which can be copied phrases which may be useful in prayer: verses of the Gospel; words of our Lord or the Apostles, or the Saints; bits of the Psalms, hymns; all short and such as may be used in a breath.'

In this way each individual can possess the prayer book which fits and belongs to her own way of approach to God.

It can be added to and altered; it will be a companion in the path of prayer and a help in difficult days.

VIII. Spiritual Reading

Our prayer life must be fed by spiritual reading and study.

This is especially necessary as our prayer passes from meditation to prayer of the heart and to more contemplative prayer.

We must learn to meditate on what we read. Instructions on the Religious Life and Rule (if we are Sisters) and on the spiritual life, should be studied and considered slowly and prayerfully.

Above all we must learn to read and use the New Testament in this way; to fill our minds with the words of our Lord and the story of His life as they are given us in the Gospels.

In the same way all study of and intimacy with the Bible is supremely important, and should be given a large place in our meditative reading.

'O Thou by Whom we come to God,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod,
Lord, teach us how to pray.'

Printed in Great Britain at S. Mary's Press, Wantage.